

County of Loudoun
Department of Planning
MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 7, 2009

TO: Mike Elabarger, Project Manager, Land Use Review

FROM: Pat Giglio, Planner III, Community Planning

SUBJECT: SPEX 2009-0030 & CMPT 2009-0009 – CWS Exit 5 Claiborne Parkway

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The applicant, Community Wireless Structures, LLC., is requesting a Special Exception (SPEX) and Commission Permit (CMPT) to construct a 155' monopole and ground-mounted equipment shelter to accommodate a mobile telecommunication facility. The site is located south of the Dulles Greenway (Route 267) and east of Claiborne Parkway (Route 901) within the right-of-way for the road interchange at Exit 5 in Ashburn. The subject site is currently zoned Planned Development-Housing (PD-H3) under the Revised 1993 Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance. A Special Exception and Commission Permit are required for the proposed telecommunication use within the zoning district. The proposed use of the subject site for a telecommunication facility is supported and in conformance with the general location and design policies outlined in the Revised General Plan and Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunications Facilities. Staff recommends approval of Commission Permit and Special Exception with conditions.

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Community Wireless Structures, LLC., is requesting a Special Exception (SPEX) and Commission Permit (CMPT) to construct a 155' monopole to accommodate a mobile telecommunication facility on a site located south of the Dulles Greenway (Route 267) and east of Claiborne Parkway (Route 901) within the right-of-way for the road interchange at Exit 5 in Ashburn. The proposed mobile telecommunication facility will consist of a 155' monopole with an antennae array located near the top of the pole, and an additional antennae array and dish antenna further down the pole with space reserved for a minimum of five (5) additional future antennae arrays. Two concrete pads with ground-mounted equipment will be located near the base of the monopole within the fenced compound (60' x100') and lease area initially. Additional areas for future

ground-mounted equipment cabinets have been reserved within the fenced compound. The equipment compound will be enclosed by an eight-foot, wooden, stockade fence over a chain link fence that will be screened by existing trees and vegetation on the site. The applicant is requesting a wavier of the Type 3 yard requirement for the subject site since the existing trees and vegetation is being used in lieu of plantings.



View Southeast from Greenway.

The subject site is currently zoned Planned Development-Housing (PD-H3) under the Revised 1993 Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance. A Special Exception is required for the proposed telecommunication use within the zoning district. Additionally the zoning ordinance required a Commission Permit when a public utility or public service facility is constructed. A Commission Permit is used to determine if the general location, character, and extent of the proposed use is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan. A site visit and review of County GIS records did not identify any significant environmental features on the subject site. The construction of the proposed access drive and equipment compound will require clearing and grading which will cause the removal of some existing trees and vegetation.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE

The site is located in the Ashburn Community within the Suburban Policy Area and is governed under the policies of the Revised General Plan (the Plan). The Revised General Plan designates this area for Residential uses (Revised General Plan, Chapter 7, Planned Land Use Map). The proposed use is specifically governed under the policies of the Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunications Facilities (*Telecommunications Plan*).

ANALYSIS

A. LAND USE

Location

The Telecommunication Plan policies establish a hierarchy of preferred locations for new commercial public telecommunication facilities in the County. The County's first preference is for new telecommunication facilities to collocate on existing buildings, towers, monopoles, water tanks, overhead utility transmission line structures and other tall structures where possible to minimize the need for new structures (*Telecommunications Plan, Countywide Location Policies, Policy 1*). If existing tall structures are not available, the County prefers that new towers or monopoles be located in planned and zoned industrial and employment areas within the Suburban Policy Area subject to performance standards to mitigate visual impacts (*Telecommunications Plan, Countywide Location Policies, Policy 3*). Additionally the County encourages the location of telecommunication facilities on light poles and other existing tall structures in the right-of the Dulles Greenway and VDOT arterial roads (*Telecommunications Plan, Urban Location Policies, Policy 2*).

The proposed site was selected by the applicant to improve the quality of wireless coverage along a segment of the Dulles Greenway and to provide enhanced in-home service for the Broadlands and Ashburn Community where service currently exists as demonstrated by the submitted radio frequency ("RF") coverage maps. Based on a search of the area, it was determined that no existing tall structures of sufficient height were present within the desired coverage area for the network and that a new facility may be justified based on network coverage requirements. All the major road interchanges within the Suburban Policy along the Dulles Greenway (Exits 3, 4, 6 & 7) with the exception of the subject site feature telecommunication facilities with monopoles ranging from 162 to 191 feet in height.

Staff finds that no existing tall structures are currently located within the vicinity of the proposed site and that construction of a new telecommunication facility may be justified based on network coverage requirements.

Design and Visual Impact

The Plan calls for design standards to mitigate the visual impacts of commercial public telecommunication facilities so as to “blend with the natural and built environment of the surrounding area” (*Telecommunications Plan, Countywide Visual Impacts, Policy 1*). The Plan directs that specific attention be paid to the setting, color, lighting, topography, materials, and architecture. Antennas and other telecommunication devices should be neutral in color to blend with the background, unless specifically required by the FAA to be painted or lighted otherwise (*Telecommunications Plan, Countywide Visual Impacts, Policy 2*). Accessory structures and equipment buildings should also blend with the surrounding environment through the use of appropriate color, texture of materials, scale, landscaping and visual screening (*Telecommunications Plan, Countywide Visual Impacts, Policy 3*).

The proposed telecommunication facility on the subject site will consist of a 150-foot monopole with 5-foot lighting rods and can accommodate up to seven (7) telecommunications providers at the proposed facility. Associated ground-mounted equipment cabinets will be located at the base of the monopole within a fenced compound (60' x100'). The compound will be enclosed by an eight-foot, wooden stockade fence over a chain link fence that will be screened by existing onsite vegetation. Staff recommends that the conditions of approval and general plat notes specify the color, texture, and materials of the proposed monopole and associated ground-mounted equipment shelters to ensure that the proposed construction is consistent with the submitted photo-simulations and drawings.

The applicant is requesting a waiver of the Type 3 landscape buffer requirements for the subject site since the existing vegetation and trees will be used in lieu of plantings. The presence of existing mature trees and vegetation provides a superior vegetative buffer which will screen the equipment compound and base of the proposed monopole from motorists and helps to mitigate the overall visual impact created by the proposed telecommunication facility on the surrounding commercial and residential areas. Staff supports the waiver request and recommends that the applicant commit to the long-term maintenance and care of the proposed fence and existing trees and vegetation to ensure that the proposed facility is adequately screened. Special precautions should be taken during the construction process to protect the existing trees and vegetation from damage (i.e. root trenching and safety fencing).

Staff finds the design of the proposed telecommunication facility is in general conformance with Plan policies. Staff recommends that conditions of approval and the general notes of the plat specify the color, texture, and materials of the proposed monopole and ground-mounted equipment to ensure that the proposed construction is consistent with the submitted photo-simulations and drawings.

Staff supports the applicants request for a waiver of the Type 3 landscape buffer and the use of the existing trees and vegetation on-site to screen the proposed facility. Staff recommends that the applicant commit to the long-term maintenance and care of the proposed fence and existing trees and vegetation to ensure that the proposed facility is adequately screened.

B. SAFETY AND HEALTH POLICIES

Plan policies state “an applicant or its successors shall remove all unused structures and facilities from a commercial public telecommunications site, including towers and monopoles, within 90 days of cessation of commercial public telecommunications use or the expiration of the lease, whichever occurs first, and the site should be restored as closely as possible to its original condition” (*Telecommunications Plan, Safety and Health Policies, Policy 2*).

Staff recommends that a condition of approval and/or plat note be included to require removal of the facility and associated equipment following cessation of use.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the application is in conformance with the general location and design policies outlined in the Revised General Plan and Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunications Facilities. Staff recommends approval of the Special Exception application provided that the applicant commit to the long-term maintenance and care of the proposed fence and vegetative landscape buffer to ensure that the proposed facility is adequately screened. Staff also recommends that a condition of approval and/or plat note be included which specifies the color, texture, and materials of the proposed monopole and ground-mounted equipment to ensure that the proposed construction is consistent with the submitted photo-simulations and drawings, and following cessation of use the applicant will be required removal of the facility. Staff recommends approval of the subject Special Exception with conditions.

Staff finds the general location and use of the subject site for a telecommunication facility is in conformance with the policies of the Revised General Plan and Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunications Facilities. Staff recommends approval of the Commission Permit.

cc: Julie Pastor, AICP, Planning Director
Cindy Keegan, AICP, Program Manager, Community Planning – via e-mail